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SUBJECT Interview with John Loftus

JENNIFER JORDAN: Today On the Agenda, we have John Loftus, author of "The Belarus Secret," a newly-released book which looks painstakingly into the past of Nazi war criminals from the Byelorussian region of the USSR who came to the United States of America with the sanction and protection of the State Department. Mr. Loftus is here to take us through that history On the Agenda.

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JORDAN: Let's start with definitions. Where and what is Byelorussia?

JOHN LOFTUS: It's a little-known country of the Eastern provinces of Poland and the Western provinces of the old Russian Empire. And it's officially an independent nation with a seat in the U.N., but it's really little more than a Soviet puppet state. All of its foreign policy is conducted by Moscow.

JORDAN: Within the citizens of Byelorussia, and something with the Nazi takeover, where were they and how did they fit in? Were they like all of the Russian peasantry or all of the Russian citizenship?

LOFTUS: They were a little different. Byelorussia was one of the most conquered nations on earth. It lay across the principal invasion routes for anyone traveling from Europe to Moscow. Everyone from Napoleon to the Crusaders marched through their borders. And as a result, they took a very laissez-faire attitude towards occupiers: "They'll be here for a while; then someone else will come in." So they were pretty much used to the idea of someone taking part of the homeland.

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The Byelorussians are also unique in another way. In the 13th Century it was the border area where most of the Jews fleeing Western Europe were dumped. It was called the settlements of the failed, one of the most densely populated Jewish areas in the world.

The Jews that arrived in Byelorussia brought with them a great many skills from Western Europe. And so they really took over the shops and the trade. It developed a great deal of hostility between the Orthodox Byelorussian peasants and the predominantly urban Jewish population. Some towns in Byelorussia were 90 percent Jewish.

Over the years, the anti-Semitism grew and continued to grow. And so by the time that World War II came around, most of the population were quite eager to see hard times fall upon their Jewish neighbors.

In the beginning, when the Nazis and their collaborators moved the Jews into the ghetto, that meant that all their homes and businesses were available to the Christian population. It was a gigantic windfall. When the Jews tried to escape from the ghetto, the peasants were given a kilo of sugar for every Jew they captured.

And according to the SS polls of the population, 80 percent of the Byelorussian population sided with the Germans during World War II and not with the Soviet Union.

So the -- the old thing: It takes a hundred people to kill a Jew, 99 to shrug their shoulders and one to pull the trigger. And I think that was probably true of Byelorussia.

JORDAN: But you said recently that the population was strongly Jewish. Now, I'm sure this is an age-old question that will go down in the history books. But why did they put up with it, if they were stronger in number and stronger in working for in -- stronger in industry and stronger in the creative and productive forces?

LOFTUS: Because they were still only ten percent of the total national population. And because they were so concentrated in the urban areas, they had no contacts, no relationship with the peasants, who had primarily an agricultural economy. And some of the Byelorussian Jews would collect taxes for the absentee Polish landlords. So the only contact the peasants would have with them was with the tax collector. And anti-Semitism became a popular cause long before Hitler's armies invaded Byelorussia.

JORDAN: All right. So then we see the Nazi army moving

into Byelorussia, and the Byelorussian Christianity, shall we say, taking sides. And that's the side of the Nazis.

Where and when did we start seeing the real pogrom start with Byelorussia and the -- well, the holocaust of Byelorussia, as recounted in your book?

LOFTUS: It started quite early. Even before the invasion, the Nazis had recruited teams of Byelorussian intelligentsia to go in with the SS and assist them with the occupation and control of the homeland.

When these teams arrived, they were installed as mayors and police chiefs, and they secretly drew up lists of their neighbors to be executed by the SS. Anyone who was a potential opponent of Nazi rule: Polish intelligentsia, Catholic clergy, Jewish intelligentsia. So the few pogroms the first few months of the occupation were limited to those groups who might organize resistance. Then the wholesale killing started.

Eichman asked that an experiment be carried out in Byelorussia.

JORDAN: Explain who Eichman is.

LOFTUS: Adolf Eichman was in charge of the final solution for the Third Reich. He was the that was to devise the plan for getting rid of Europe's unwanted Jewish population. He thought of deportation and sending them to Palestine. But eventually he hit upon the idea of simply sending them out to the Byelorussian pale, where they could be worked to death or starved to death, and no one would care.

Well, in October 1941, Stanislas Stankevich, who had been appointed by the SS as mayor of this little town of Borasal (?), was given orders to carry out the first experiment in mass murder. He was told by the SS to have his police force murder every Jewish man, woman and child in his county. His police shuttled the Jewish population out in trucks to large pits that had been dug on the road leading out to the airport. The Jews were placed in layers, lay down in the pits, and then they were shot through with machine guns so they could save ammunition by shooting through two rows of bodies at once. A layer of dirt was shoveled over them, and the next layer of Jews were made to climb down to the graves.

The worst part of the atrocities weren't discovered until after the war, when Western doctors and Soviet physicians were doing autopsies in the graves. They could find no bullet wounds on the infants. Apparently, they figured that the children were too small to climb out of the graves, and they

were simply buried alive.

Between 6500 and 7000 Jews were executed in Borasal in a single day.

The atrocities so revolted some German intelligence officers who witnessed it that they later turned up at the Nuremberg war crimes prosecution as witnesses for the prosecution. Stanislas Stankevich was denounced at Nuremberg, placed on their wanted list. He denounced in the United Nations. He was even mentioned before Congress as an example of the sort of person who should never be allowed into America. At the very time in 1948 that our congressmen were holding Stakevich up as a black example, American intelligence had put him in charge of a refugee camp in West Germany and put him on the American payroll.

Despite the fact that he was rejected six times for a visa as a war criminal, as a communist collaborator, as a Nazi collaborator, he was brought to this country and given a good job with Radio Liberty, and he died here a citizen of the United States just before we could bring him to trial.

JORDAN: Your book, "The Belarus Secret," deals with these Nazi war criminals and the Byelorussian Nazi war criminals coming in and living rather a nice life in New Jersey, specifically. All I can say is, how and why? Where does this begin, that our government started sanctioning these people and bringing them in and allowing them -- and not only allowing them, giving them a free ticket?

LOFTUS: Well, it wasn't our government. Both President Truman and Roosevelt had specifically prohibited bringing in Nazi collaborators and war criminals. There was a minority group in the State Department that thought that Dewey would get elected President in '48, and they took things on their own. They were warning war criminals to go into hiding so they couldn't be subject to extradition to the Soviets. And these people sincerely believed that the Soviet Union was going to invade West Germany in 1948. And so they were desperate for any form of intelligence behind the Iron Curtain.

Well, the Byelorussian collaborators promptly said that they had a great deal of experience in spying behind the Iron Curtain, since they'd done it for the SS; and they were more than willing to continue doing it for the British. And the British eventually turned these groups over to the Americans.

JORDAN: Are the Americans, in doing this, or the State Department, in allowing them to come in, in effect turning its back a second time by sanctioning the criminals of these crimes?

LOFTUS: Yeah. I think a lot of people during the Cold War felt that, "Well, World War II is over. The Nazis are defeated. Nothing we can do will bring the Jews back. So let's use whatever we can to fight the real enemy, the communists."

Unfortunately, they broke all the rules of the intelligence profession. You see, Congress had passed a law saying if you want to bring in people with loathsome backgrounds who are ineligible for American citizenship, you can do it under a special law, provided the Attorney General and the head of the CIA agrees.

Well, the State Department didn't want the CIA to know what they were doing. And so they smuggled these people in without background checks. If they had done the background checks, if they had let CIA do the research, they would have discovered that these people, many of them, were working on both sides of the fence. They had been spying for the Communists before, during and after the war.

The Soviet Union was delighted to have the Americans and British recruit these war criminals because they were the one group of people that Soviet military intelligence had penetrated during World War II. This was the center of the Soviet partisan warfare. They had spies at every level of the collaborators. So when we brought the collaborators here, we brought the Soviet agents among them as well.

JORDAN: Can we expect to defend freedom, which is evidently why we bring these people in and have them work in an anti-Communist, anti-Soviet nature -- but can we expect to defend the freedom of our country and other countries by defending the rights of these blatant killers?

LOFTUS: Well, intelligence is a very, very tough profession. And I think that, as with the German rocket scientists, sometimes you have to make hard decisions, that no matter how loathsome a person is, that maybe his interest to the national security outweighs that. Now, those are really tough decisions to make.

JORDAN: Who makes them?

LOFTUS: Well, when it goes by the book, Congress is involved in it, the President is involved in it, the heads of the intelligence services. And these are pretty reasonable people who feel the same revulsion that you and I do towards them. So when they finally approve to bring someone in under the lawful program, it's usually because they have a very, very good reason.

That's not what I'm talking about here. What happened

in this case was that it was illegal immigration that the official channels of government knew nothing about. And because it was illegal, it had to be covered up. The CIA could not be let in on what was happening. And that caused numerous disasters.

During the 1950s, when the CIA took over, at least in name, the State Department operations, they were supposed to be running parachute drops behind the Iron Curtain. The CIA didn't know that the agents they were using were people that had been identified five and ten years previously as Communist agents. We lost virtually our entire intelligence network behind the Iron Curtain as a result of these penetrations.

The CIA finally forced the OPC unit to drop using the emigre groups. They were an unmitigated disaster.

For 30 years the CIA has been blamed for these covert operations. Wrong agency. I saw a very, very classified document in which the head of the CIA addressed the Army War College and indicated that he strongly protested against these operations, but had been ordered to cooperate.

JORDAN: Then the agency responsible is?

LOFTUS: Well, the State Department. But you see, under the Eisenhower Administration, apparently these programs received sanction at higher levels, someone with enough authority that ordered the CIA to cooperate. Eisenhower had three special assistants that ran these operations. They were sort of to protect him in case anything went wrong. And they were C.B. Jackson, Nelson Rockefeller, and Richard Nixon.

Now, you can imagine by 1960, when the last OPC operation, the Bay of Pigs, has been lined up and all the other ones have been disasters, and the Nazi groups have been dropped because of Communist penetration, and that even the head of the British Secret Service that sold us these Nazi groups, Kim Philby, is getting ready to defect to Moscow, that Richard Nixon may not have wanted all of this to come out at that time. It would have been embarrassing to his political career, to say the least. I think that's why the cover-up lasted so long. So many of the people that were involved with these State Department operations back in the '40s and the early '50s later went on to develop very, very prominent political careers. It was not the sort of thing they wanted to surface.

JORDAN: And it didn't.

You are On the Agenda. My name is Jennifer Jordan. We're talking with John Loftus, author of "The Belarus Secret,"

which deals with Nazi war criminals and their happily-ever-after life in America with the State Department sanction.

Mr. Loftus, how did you get involved and how did you get your hands on these documents?

LOFTUS: Well, I was a trial attorney at Criminal Division and was getting ready to come back to Boston -- I was always planning to come back to private practice -- when I saw a note that a new unit, the Office of Special Investigations, had been formed to centralize efforts to hunt Nazi war criminals. Well, I spoke a little German, I had the right intelligence background, so I thought I'd go over for a few months. I ended up spending more than two years.

Like all the other attorneys, I was given a regional group of cases. My region happened to be Byelorussia. And going through all the files, I noticed that there were striking inconsistencies. The FBI, for example, was pretending not to know information in some case it had already learned two years previously in another case. And it happened too often to be a coincidence.

So I very carefully made up a list of possibilities that would explain how these inconsistencies...

JORDAN: What kinds of inconsistencies did you find? I mean just give us some idea.

LOFTUS: Documents out of sequence. There are leads that would come up. Army counterintelligence would write to the FBI and say, "This man Emmanuel Jasiak (?) is a suspected war criminal. He emigrated illegally to this country. We want you to investigate." Well, when the FBI went to visit Jasiak, it wasn't to investigate him for his Nazi background, it was to recruit him. The FBI already knew that the Byelorussians were being funded by the State Department [unintelligible] group. So they were recruiting their own Byelorussian Nazis to find out what the other intelligence agencies were doing.

When we finally got a glimpse of what was happening, I asked the Justice Department for permission to investigate it further. I went directly to each of the intelligence vaults. But I didn't go up to the top level, to the Pentagon. I went right down to the clerks in the vaults, flashed my Justice Department credentials. And when they checked back with their security office, they found out that I had more security clearances than almost anyone in government. At that time they said, "Well, sure," and gave me files.

And as the stuff started to come out -- most of the

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people in the intelligence community were pretty revolted when they discovered what was in the files. They were very helpful. And often I would say, "Well, look. We don't want to get your agency involved. You're only peripheral here. We want to go back and get the agency that did it."

JORDAN: Uh-huh.

LOFTUS: "So don't blow the whistle on your guys. Blow it on another agency." And so they all blew the whistle on each other. And before all of the agencies realized what would happen, I had gone through each of the vaults, cross-referenced the documents, and we knew exactly what had occurred and why.

JORDAN: Now, has the government given you sanction to publish the book?

LOFTUS: Oh, yeah. I asked the -- when Stankevich died, I realized that this was crazy. I could spend another 2 1/2 years building a case, and the guy could drop dead again. And besides, I was really more interested in another section, the Public Integrity Section that was investigating the cover-up from Congress.

So I asked the justice Department, the CIA, the Pentagon, everybody else if I could write a book only about the dead Nazis; and I would submit it for review to the intelligence community and we'd see if they'd clear it. So they agreed.

JORDAN: And they did.

LOFTUS: And they did.

JORDAN: In other words, there are more living, still, in this country.

LOFTUS: Oh, yes.

JORDAN: Is that the goal of your book, to force -- to force an action by the government to either get them out or to force the American public to say, "Wait a minute. What's going on here? We want the dirty laundry aired a bit"?

LOFTUS: Yeah. I think it's really to late to do anything to the individual Nazis. There's a very limited number of attorneys that can process these cases. Maybe all tolled, we can do 40 to 80 cases before the last Nazi dies in America. At least we're making the effort and setting the historical precedent that people like this will never get away with it as long as they live. They might be next. We're always going to be pursuing them.

Most important, I think the reason I wrote the book was to teach the American people that, as Churchill said, it was not only wrong, it was a mistake; that using such people is not only morally offensive, but it's counterproductive to national security. The Soviets had a field day making propaganda against the Americans. They would tell people, "Go ahead and listen to Radio Liberty. The broadcaster there is Stanislas Stankevich, the man who murdered your cousins." You know, we played right into their hands.

The one insuperable advantage we have over the Soviets in foreign affairs is our good name, that people trust us. We're a moderate, responsible country. And we let a handful of reckless amateurs in the intelligence community take over programs that virtually dictated foreign policy. They engineered coups during the Cold War. They recruited secret police organizations, some of which make the SS look tame by comparison. They conducted these activities with only the most minimal approval within the Executive Branch and without Congress knowing anything about it.

And I think it's time that the American people demanded that Congress take this area of responsibility back over. The Constitution says that only Congress has the power to determine eligibility for citizenship. But for the last 30 years that power has been exercised secretly and abused by various people within the intelligence community, and Congress has done nothing about it.

JORDAN: If you were to illustrate those with true guilt to raise their hands and to say, "We went beyond the powers of government. We went beyond the powers of justice," who would be raising their hands? Is it the Nelson Rockefeller group and those three that you mentioned?

LOFTUS: Yeah. I think they were policy figures. And people told me that everything was approved at the White House level, which would indicate those three people.

But more directly, the guys that were directly in on it, Allen Dulles and Frank Wisner. Those would be the people who more than anyone were responsible for this program.

I talked to retired intelligence officials who had worked with both men, and all came up with the same verdict. They were warned over and over again that using these people was reckless, there was a tremendous risk of [unintelligible], that it was bound to backlash sooner or later. Nevertheless, they kept on with it. They had an [unintelligible] that these secret armies behind the Iron Curtain would actually somehow manage to defeat the largest [unintelligible] in the world.

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JORDAN: Is our country so anti-Soviet and anti-Communist that it can't see the philosophic similarity between Naziism and Communism and the same fascist dictatorship and the same totalitarian connection? I mean [unintelligible] were under a different flag.

LOFTUS: There is a sad joke in Russia that a hundred years from now the history books will say that Hitler was a petty tyrant during the time of Stalin.

I don't think there is a dime's worth of difference, other than in the body count.

JORDAN: I mean Stalin killed 20 million of his own people on the street.

LOFTUS: Yeah.

JORDAN: Is that -- I mean where do we say we can support the Nazis because they're anti-Soviet, when in fact they're both out to kill?

LOFTUS: [Unintelligible] I think the saddest part of all is that 99 percent of all the emigres that came to this country hate both Nazis and Communists. And they would have been very willing to work with the United States to try and liberate their homelands. But they weren't called on. They wanted to use the people that had experience, intelligence professionals who had been trained by the SS. Well, we got what we paid for.

JORDAN: In your book you state that the truth shall make you free. But the American people have been faced with a lot of truths and have not always chosen to face them. You can't force freedom. And in that, how can we take such as "The Belarus Secret" and such as the truths of Watergate, even, and say this is what is. I mean do you see what I'm saying? How can you bring this intelligence and make it work?

LOFTUS: Well, I think that the whole point of what I've been doing for the last three years, which is try and get one copy of the book out -- because as soon as one copy was out, that was a strong warning to the intelligence community that they may cover things like this up for ten years, 20 years, or even 30 years, but sooner or later someone like me is going to come along and find out about it....

JORDAN: It's the beauty of democracy when it works.

LOFTUS: There's no other country in the world where I would have been given permission by my government to stand up and criticize such a horrendous mistake.

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JORDAN: Any response from them?

LOFTUS: All of the intelligence communities have remained silent. None of them has issued...

JORDAN: That's not a very smart intelligence community.

LOFTUS: I think most of them are pretty honest. The people who are there now had nothing to do with these programs. These are things that happened 10 and 20 years ago. And I think they were as shocked as I. As a matter of fact, a lot of people would come up in the hallways [unintelligible].

JORDAN: [Unintelligible]...that we have been effective in defending freedom in Third World countries, in Eastern Europe? Not Eastern Europe, obviously. [Unintelligible]...in Europe, in this country. Have we accomplished a bit of the goal that we set out to do?

LOFTUS: No. I think there are real problems for us in America. During the French Revolution, we had to choose between our loyalties to Lafayette and the Royalists and our loyalties to the French people. Now, we resolved it by being neutral in favor of the people in those days.

But now our national policy seems to have changed, that we'll support any right-wing fanatic, as long as he's anti-Communist, regardless of the misery, the torture and the oppression that he visits upon his own citizens. So we've lost the love and respect of virtually every country in the world because a handful of politicians thought it more important to prop up a few anti-Communist puppets.

JORDAN: Are we still doing that now to the same degree? Can you say it and still...

LOFTUS: Yeah. I can't promise [unintelligible] accurate. But I think if you read the press reports, that our government's pursuing an energetic clandestine program in South America. And some of those governments are very questionable [unintelligible].

JORDAN: Is there anything that we, as American citizens, listening and living and reading the papers, can do, can actually do to affect the decisions made in the powers that be?

LOFTUS: Yeah. I think...

JORDAN: To call up and say, "Get out of South America," or, "Get out of...."

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LOFTUS: Well, you know, I think the solution is much simpler than that. Just simply call your congressman and say, "I want this investigated. I don't want this one to drop through the cracks. If they can bring in Nazis, they can bring in anybody. Don't let this investigation die."

I think that there's a very real chance that it might. There aren't many Jewish voters in America. It's not a sexy issue. It's a moral issue.

I think the main thing is to keep the heat on Congress, to make sure that they follow the congressional investigations. If Congress stands as a check on intelligence policy, immigration policy, there's a lot to be said for that. Just to know that someday someone might go over your books is often the best incentive to keep those books in order.

JORDAN: Clean.

LOFTUS: Yeah. I'm not saying that the Congress should lean over the intelligence professionals' shoulders and say what they should or should not do. All I'm saying is they certainly should come in, at least after the fact, and review what has been done. And Congress has been very, very negligent in that regard.

JORDAN: What would be your suggestion for the future, for an outlook, for beginning right now to clean our act up and to make our government once again respectable the world over, once again formidable to the Soviet nation? Now I don't think they're looking at it very formidably.

LOFTUS: I think a lot of people around the world genuinely wish us well, but think that Americans are very naive and are woefully ignorant about world politics. I think that when issues like this come up, people today are learning about the Holocaust, learning about Eastern Europe, the terrible things that happened. I think we're getting more and more of an international perspective.

I think that the short-range solution is education. We've got to realize how much we don't know about the world. In the long run, I think the real solution for this might be a whistle blowers act, setting up a special section in Congress where people who have knowledge of illegal intelligence programs can come with full immunity and legally disclose the information, and then just have a congressman pick up a phone call and say, "We know about it. We want it stopped."

JORDAN: I recently read a book comparing the Weimar Republic [unintelligible] Nazi Germany with contemporary America, [unintelligible] parallels. Do you see any kinds of intellectual comparisons to be made between what our government is becoming

and moving into, what they're supporing, and the downfall of the Weimar Republic?

LOFTUS: Oh, I think it's very easy to see a parallel in terms of a trend toward immorality, a disgust with government in general, that there's nothing that can be done, a popular anger swelling up as the economy heads further and further into disarray.

I'm an optimist. I think that the one thing that Americans do is solve problems, and we solve government problems, intelligence problems. I think for 30 years people didn't know we had a problem, that our intelligence community is scattered and divided. People compete with each other, and that very division allows these illegal operations to happen.

No, I don't think that America's going down the tubes. I think that this is a sign of America's strength, that we could have written that such terrible things happened, and then take action [unintelligible].

JORDAN: Thank you for being with us, and good luck on your book, "The Belarus Secret."